

The Holiday of the Entrepreneurs

Category: Emor, Vayikra

The Jewish trait that created Pesach Sheni.

Israeli Chutzpah

Recently, the Israeli media interviewed the vice president of development of AT&T. She lives in Israel, and from there, she is responsible for 1600 employees of the American company. In the interview, she defined the contribution of the Americans to Israel and the contribution of Israelis to America: “The Americans teach us how to be organized, and we teach them to dare.”

In America, everything has to be planned in advance. Rehearsals are carried out for every event; for a bar mitzvah, the whole family comes and practices what everyone will do and say at which specific moment. Every event has a party planner and a financial planner.

People even plan their funerals in advance. Some go so far as to write their own obituary and appoint someone to read it at the funeral. This is true in every aspect of life; at work and at home, there is an order and a spreadsheet for everything.

There are many people who could tell you which day of the week August 10th will be. They have a calendar in their head; vacations are planned at least six months in advance, and weddings at least a year in advance.

Israelis, on the other hand, do not like to plan anything. Everything is last minute; they follow what is known as “*tarbut hasmoch*” the culture of “it will all work out,” in which everyone is convinced that things will work out either way — even if that is not always the case.

On one hand, it expresses a lack of discipline and professionalism, but on the other hand, *tarbut hasmoch* creates a space that allows for the realization of the unique talents of Israelis. *Tarbut hasmoch* is a combination of *chutzpah*, creativity, daring and the ability to improvise.

The difference between Israelis and Americans is often on display at weddings. In

the United States, invitations are sent along with return cards, and every guest sends it back to indicate whether he is going to attend. The hosts then know how many places to prepare and how many dishes to order. In Israel, this concept used to be almost nonexistent; there is no way to know how many guests will attend the wedding, and in truth, the guests themselves do not know either until the last minute.

Truthfully, these traits are not Israeli, but Jewish. These are traits that Jews have developed to survive two thousand years of exile, against all odds. It just so happens that Israelis display these traits in a more extroverted way.

Where does this strength and ability to improvise come from? Where did it originate?

The Home-Grown Holiday

In this week's Torah portion, Parshat Emor, the Torah enumerates all the holidays. It begins with Shabbat, and then goes through the calendar: Passover, Sefirat HaOmer, Shavuot, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret. One holiday is not mentioned.

Which holiday?

Purim and Chanukah are holidays that were created after the Torah was written. Lag B'Omer certainly did not exist. But there is one holiday that is written in the Torah and yet is not mentioned in this week's Torah portion: Pesach Sheni, which falls out on Sunday (Pesachim 6b).

The story of this holiday is told in Parshat Behaalotcha. In the first year after the people of Israel left Egypt, they celebrated Passover on its regular date of 15 Nissan. However, there were some people who were impure; they had to go through the seven-day purification process, and by the eve of Passover, they were still impure and unable to offer the Passover sacrifice.

The Talmud says, "Who were those people? They were the bearers of Joseph's coffin; these are the words of Rabbi Yossi the Galilean."

We all know the story at the end of Genesis, where Joseph, before his death, makes his brothers swear that when they are redeemed from Egypt, they will take

his bones. Indeed, when the time came for the exodus, Moses took the bones of Joseph along with him, and people were appointed to attend to the coffin throughout all their wanderings. Because of their contact with a dead body, they were considered impure, and were therefore unable to take part in the Passover sacrifice.

“Rabbi Akiva says: Mishael and Eltzafan, who dealt with Nadav and Avihu.” In Rabbi Akiva’s opinion, it was a different group of people who were impure, those who were involved in the sad story of Aaron’s sons.

On the first of Nissan that year, Moses erected the Tabernacle, and for the first seven days, he erected and dismantled the Tabernacle every day. On the eighth day, the 8th of Nissan, the official dedication of the Tabernacle was held. On that day, Nadav and Avihu entered the Tabernacle without permission to burn incense — and they died inside the Tabernacle. Moses commanded Mishael and Eltzafan to take care of the dead and to bury them. As a result, they became impure, and when the eve of Passover came, it was still the seventh and last day of impurity — and they were not able to offer a Passover sacrifice.

These people came to Moses and claimed, “Why should we be left out?” Because we were busy with one mitzvah we should lose the opportunity to participate in another? (B’haaloscha Chapter 9).

The Silent Majority

The Rebbe points out that this claim doesn’t seem justified. “The claim of these individuals, regarding their desire to fulfill the mitzvah the Passover lamb, seems surprising. If G-d wants them to keep the mitzvah of the Passover sacrifice, He will surely command Moses to instruct them in this regard. If Moses did not say anything to them, it means that they do not have any obligation to fulfill the mitzvah. So what exactly is their complaint? (Torah Menachem 5744 vol. 3 pg. 1680).

Most people are naturally a part of the so-called “silent majority.” They like to “just follow orders.” If they are told to stand in line, they stand in line, if they are told to turn right, they turn right. Most people are conformists, they like to follow instructions. This was especially the case after the giving of the Torah, when the Jewish people declared, “We will do and we will listen,” declaring that they would

follow the instructions of G-d through Moses. This was a strange anomaly; suddenly, they come and challenged Moses: “Why were we left out?”

Moreover: What exactly is the thought process here? If someone couldn't fast on Yom Kippur for whatever reason, does he come to the rabbi and ask to fast a week later? If you were on a cruise on Sukkot, will you build a sukkah and celebrate Sukkot a week later? Each mitzvah is observed in a specific time, and we don't usually seek to change that!

The Lesson

In the end, they got what they wanted. G-d told Moses that they were right, and informed them that a month later they would have the opportunity to make a redo; they would offer the Passover sacrifice and celebrate the Seder night on the 14th of Iyar.

The Rebbe explained that this teaches us an amazing lesson. “Whenever a Jew feels that he lacks something in a matter related to fear of G-d, Torah and mitzvos, he should not rely on anyone, not even Moses and not even G-d Himself, so to speak. Instead, he shouts and demands, ‘Why am I left out!’” And when we do so, we gain an entirely new holiday, Pesach Sheni.

Perhaps Pesach Sheni is not mentioned in this week's Parsha because the holidays in our Parsha are holidays that G-d initiated, while Pesach Sheni is a holiday that comes “from below,” from the people of Israel.

In our day, we mark Pesach Sheni by eating matzah and trying to internalize the message of the day.

Pesach Sheni is the holiday of entrepreneurs. It celebrates those who do not wait for instructions, those who dare to think alone and to challenge the system. They paved the way for the other holidays initiated by the Jewish people (of course, based on Torah instructions) like Chanukah, Purim, Simchas Torah and Lag Baomer. And if you pay close attention, you'll notice that the holidays which came from the people — holidays that we do not do because we are fulfilling instructions — are the most joyful holidays of all.

The message of Pesach Sheni is: Don't wait for instructions. If you see something

that needs to be corrected, get up and do something. You will create a new reality. In the words of Hillel, "Where there is no one, try to be someone."